

Thank you, Dr. Robinson. And thanks to you and your entire team over at the Department of Health for putting this summit together.

It's my pleasure to welcome Secretary Leavitt to Tennessee and to thank him for being such a solid partner with our state over the years as we've tackled a variety of issues impacting the health and wellbeing of our citizens.

For those of you who may not be aware, Secretary Leavitt has been traveling across the country over these last months visiting groups just like the one gathered here today. His message ... as you will hear in a moment ... is simple – and one that is familiar to anyone who has ever been, or knows anything about, the Boy Scout motto. His message to the country: “Be Prepared.”

When it comes to the very serious possibility of a flu pandemic, never have truer words been spoken. Today's summit brings together the top minds from the federal government, from state government, and from the private sector. It allows us to open the communication lines so that if ... God forbid ... an outbreak does occur, Tennessee will be prepared to meet the challenge.

The reality is, pandemics have been a challenge to our society since society began. We've spent a considerable amount of time studying previous outbreaks – learning about what was done right, what was done wrong, and how the advances of the 21st century can change the outcome of any future pandemic.

Tennessee is already well on its way to meeting the challenge. Dr. Robinson and his team are in the process of a comprehensive revision of our pandemic response plan that will incorporate new federal guidelines issued last fall. We've asked a diverse group of stakeholders for their expertise during this process ... including representatives of state and local governments, and of our business, education, faith and public health communities. Once it's complete next month, the plan will become a critical part of the state's emergency management response efforts.

Government is doing its part – but the responsibility doesn't end with government. Every person, every family, every business, every church, every community has a stake in what comes out of today's summit – and I encourage all of you to take what you learn here and apply it to your own unique situations back home. What we do today will directly determine the outcome of tomorrow.

The bottom line is: I want us to leave today's summit with a better understanding of the roles each of us ... both individually and as organizations ... would play in the event of a pandemic. What I don't want to happen is for us to allow the seriousness of this subject to transform the conversation from public preparedness to public paralysis.

So ... as these discussions begin today ... I urge everyone to use some of that good old commonsense Tennessee is famous for. We will work together. We will give the public the critical information they need. We will be prepared. But we will not incite unnecessary alarm.

Whether it's pandemic flu, tornadoes, or an earthquake, our ability to respond effectively in an emergency requires a good plan and clear lines of communication at all levels. Working together, we'll make Tennessee a safer place for all of its citizens.

Once again, I'm very happy Secretary Leavitt could join us here today ... and I thank each and every one of you for your participation in this important conversation.

Thank you.

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